

GAME PRESERVATION IN KASHMIR

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BOMBAY NATURAL
HISTORY SOCIETY'S DELEGATION
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INTRODUCTION

The Director-General of Shikar and Tourism in Kashmir having requested the Bombay Natural History Society to make certain recommendations for the protection and preservation of game animals, in particular the Kashmir Stag or Barasingh (*Cervus hanglu*), we arrived in Srinagar on the 17th and 18th October 1952 for this purpose. Between the 19th and 28th October visits were made to the sanctuary of Lower Dachigam (between 6 & 7000 ft. elevation) and other Rakhs or Reserves, and to Gratnar (9800 ft.) in the sanctuary of Upper Dachigam.

The visits to Lower Dachigam gave us opportunities to see not only this important sanctuary for the Kashmir Barasingh, which come down to these lower altitudes in the late autumn and winter, but also some of these grand creatures themselves. Two stags were seen, with good heads of about 38" and 42", the latter with a number of hinds. We also saw Black Bear, including a pair, and a bear with 2 cubs. It is obvious from tracks and droppings that Black Bear are in abundance in this area.

It is the policy of the Game Department that the Dachigam Sanctuary, Upper and Lower, should serve as a stock breeding ground for Barasingh, forming the main pool from which these animals find their way to other connected Rakhs or Reserves. We consider this a wise policy, but under the circumstances we strongly feel that the Dachigam Sanctuary is under-staffed and that the present staff is not adequate to prevent poaching.

SOME OF THE APPARENT CAUSES OF POACHING

- (1) Considerable increase of guns.
- (2) Decrease in game protection staff and low salaries of subordinate staff.
- (3) Food shortage, hitherto, and high cost of mutton; the demand for venison thus bringing in considerable profit to poachers.
- (4) Withdrawal of magisterial powers of Game Wardens and difficulty in securing adequate punishment of poachers in the ordinary lawcourts.

With the advent of a democratic form of Government a large number of gun licences were issued for the protection of crops etc. There was a

¹ This report was originally not intended for publication but, though belated, it is now considered desirable to put it on record. In spite of enquiries, the Society has no official information whether any of the recommendations of its representatives have been given effect to.—Eds.

period of lawlessness prior to this, and the tribal raid occurred subsequently. It is estimated that very considerable poaching of the Barasingh occurred during these periods and their numbers were greatly diminished.

From figures supplied to us it would appear that the Game Watchers and the Jemadars are inadequately paid. They cannot live on the salaries they receive, and the result cannot but be an indirect encouragement to poaching. Once a subordinate finds that only by corruption can he obtain the means of livelihood, corruption will become a second nature to him and he will encourage rather than try to stop poaching. For comparison it may be pointed out that the Game Watchers in the Ceylon Game Department earn Rs. 45 to Rs. 65 per month; and in the Mysore State Rs. 45 to Rs. 60, including dearness allowance. Game Supervisors in Mysore, who may be said to be the equivalent to the Kashmir Game Jemadars, get up to Rs. 85 p.m.; and in Ceylon 'Game Guards', of a similar status, receive up to Rs. 86 p.m. The Dachigam Sanctuary is a long and large area, and however conscientiously the present staff might patrol it, their numbers are, we consider, quite inadequate for efficient results.

For the efficient administration of the Game laws and centralised supervision, we consider that the Rakhs or Game Reserves now under the administration of three Departments (Game, Tawaza, and Forest) should be amalgamated under a single Department.

At present it would appear that the GAME DEPARTMENT controls the following :—

1. Oвра.
2. Khiram.
3. Dachigam.
4. Half of Khunmuh (Chukor).
5. Cheshme-Shahi.
6. Bren (Chukor).
7. Kishat (Chukor).
8. Dara (Chukor).
9. Mirgund (Duck).
10. Hygam (Duck).
11. Shalabug (Snipe).
12. Pampur (Duck).

The TAWAZA DEPARTMENT appears to control :—

1. Khrew and Khrewshar.
2. Khunmuh.
3. Tral.
4. Aripal.
5. Hokra (Duck).

The FOREST DEPARTMENT controls the following :—

1. Achibal.
2. Razpariyani.
3. Ajas.
4. Chatragul.
5. Wangat.
6. Kazinag.

Although at present the Director-General of Shikar and Tourism is the head of both the Game and Tawaza Departments, it is considered that the whole could be more efficiently administered if brought under a single unified executive control with the staff of each receiving the same terms of pay and pensions. We are informed that the Watchers of the Tawaza Department receive pensions on retirement, but not those of the Game Department. This is, we feel, an additional encouragement to corruption in respect of Watchers of the latter department. Unless the Rakhs now under the control of the Forest Department are commercially essential to that Department for timber or other forest produce, we consider that in the interests of effective fauna preservation they should be transferred to the unified control of the Game Department.

BLACK BEARS

From all accounts Black Bear have increased very considerably in the last few years and are rightly regarded as a pest. It would appear that quite a number were shot in the past by villagers with crop-protection guns and by holders of Rs. 15 Black Bear licences, thus securing the reward paid for Black Bear by Government. It is probably correct to assume, we consider, that with the high prices now secured for venison, slackening of the enforcement of the Game laws, and insufficient staff, those who previously shot Black Bear for the government reward and/or its pelt have now swelled the ranks of the poachers and concentrate on slaughtering the Barasingh. This would account for the present increase in the number of Black Bear, which, in turn, are known to prey on the fawns of Barasingh.

Lower Dachigam *stinks* of Black Bear, and their droppings and tracks cover the whole area.

The following Rakhs were visited in company with a member of the Director-General of Tourism's staff :

Ovra ; Khiram ; Khunmuh and Khrew-Khrewshar ; and also some exclusively small game reserves, e.g. Hokra, Shalabug.

As in other parts of India, it appears that difficulty is experienced in getting poachers convicted in the ordinary Criminal Courts or, if convicted, in getting adequate sentences imposed. For example, a poacher with a licensed crop-protection gun may be fined a sum for killing a Barasingh which is considerably less than the amount realised by the sale of its flesh and hide ; nor is the gun confiscated. Thus the punishment is no deterrent to the poacher. Many others, even with unlicensed guns, are acquitted, the offenders denying their guilt and the court demanding independent eye-witnesses whom the Game Department cannot produce. Enforcement of the Game laws thus becomes not only difficult but a farce. The *only* curbs to poaching, as has been proved elsewhere, are :

(i) A well-paid subordinate staff of an adequate strength.

(ii) Proper enforcement of the Game laws by a co-operative judiciary prepared to inflict deterrent sentences on offenders. Or preferably the Game Warden should be vested with the power to compound offences and to confiscate the guns of offenders, and generally placed in a position to inflict deterrent punishment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) It is our opinion that Black Bear should be declared vermin for a period of 5 years initially and subject to review thereafter, and the reward for the destruction of the same should be increased to Rs. 15, payable to both sportsmen or others.

(2) We would further make the following recommendations :

(a) Crop-protection guns should be withdrawn from the licensees during the bear hibernation period (December to March) when the Barasingh descends to lower elevations and is vulnerable to poaching.

(b) Guns should be issued to Jemadars and Head Watchers to ensure efficient patrolling of their areas and to enable them to destroy Black Bears and other vermin. The number of Black Bear is so great now that the subordinate staff cannot be expected to patrol their areas properly if unarmed. In any patrolling they now do they are likely to declare their position and approach to poachers by talking loudly to scare away bears and so also disturbing the other game. If single-handed and unarmed, the patrols cannot reasonably be expected to tackle armed poachers without help within call.

(c) Licensees should have the power to arrest poachers and to hand the latter's gun over to the Game Warden, as in South India.

(d) The penalty for poaching should be increased to Rs. 300, since the present maximum penalty of Rs. 100 is considerably less than the value of a dead Barasingh.

(e) Suitable and keen persons should be appointed Honorary Game Wardens to assist the Game Department.

(f) Licensees should be asked to report the existence of machans or hides over salt-licks and paths to salt-licks and water.

(g) The number of Game Watchers in Dachigam (Upper and Lower) should be increased to 18 or 20 (from the present 11), including a separate Head Watcher at Gratnar.

(h) The total emoluments of both Game Watchers and Jemadars should be brought into line with those of South India and Ceylon, and the Watchers of the Game Department should also be entitled to pensions on retirement, same as in the Tawaza Department.

(i) The Game and Tawaza Departments should be amalgamated forthwith, and if possible the Game Rakhs now controlled by the Forest Department transferred to their unified control.

(j) The credentials and antecedents of those applicants for Big Game Shooting Licences who reside in the State and who are not well-known to the authorities should be carefully scrutinized before such applications are granted.

(3) It is suggested

(a) That for the sake of precision the scientific names of species listed in the schedules of the Game Preservation Act should be noted against the English names.

(b) That the gate leading into the Lower Dachigam Sanctuary should be repaired and that it should be kept padlocked at night.

(c) That licences for trout and other fishing in the Dachigam and other Rakhs be not withheld from sportsmen, since fishing does not cause any disturbance to game animals and the presence of sportsmen within

the sanctuaries and reserves will act as a deterrent to poachers of Barasingh and other game.

(4) The Director-General of Tourism and Shikar had asked for clarification on the source of supply of the Kashmir wool known as 'Shahtoshah'. All the data we have procured indicate that although the soft undercoat of the Ibex, Tibetan Antelope and Tibetan Gazelle forms (or did in the past) a part of the supply, this wool is for the most part obtained from the Tibetan Goat and imported into Kashmir from across its northern frontier.

(5) Finally, we were also asked to advise on the question of importing other species of animals which would be likely to thrive in Kashmir—the Elk and Red Deer being mentioned. We do not consider this to be a wise course. From experience of the consequences of importations of foreign animal species in other parts of the world, we feel that it would not be advisable to adopt such measures, at any rate in the present state of our knowledge concerning their ecology etc.